

National Preparedness Policy: Homeland Security Issues in the 116th Congress

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The United States is threatened by a wide array of hazards, including natural disasters, acts of terrorism, viral pandemics, and man-made disasters, such as the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. The way the nation strategically prioritizes and allocates resources to prepare for all hazards can significantly influence the ultimate cost to society, both in the number of human casualties and the scope and magnitude of economic damage. As authorized in part by the Post-Katrina Emergency Reform Act of 2006 (PKEMRA; P.L. 109-295), the President, acting through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Administrator, is directed to create a “national preparedness goal” (NPG) and develop a “national preparedness system” (NPS) that will help “ensure the Nation’s ability to prevent, respond to, recover from, and mitigate against natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and other man-made disasters” (6 U.S.C. §§743-744).

Currently, NPG and NPS implementation is guided by [Presidential Policy Directive 8: National Preparedness \(PPD-8\)](#), issued by then-President Barack Obama on March 30, 2011. PPD-8 rescinded the existing [Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8: National Preparedness \(HSPD-8\)](#), which was released and signed by then-President George W. Bush on December 17, 2003.

As directed by PPD-8, the NPS is supported by numerous [strategic component policies](#), national planning frameworks (e.g., the National Response Framework), and federal interagency operational plans (e.g., the Protection Federal Interagency Operational Plan). In brief, the NPS and its many component policies represent the federal government’s strategic vision and planning, with input from the [whole community](#), as it relates to preparing the nation for all hazards. The NPS also establishes methods for achieving the nation’s desired level of preparedness for both federal and nonfederal partners by identifying the core capabilities necessary to achieve the NPG. A *capability* is [defined in law](#) as “the ability to provide the means to accomplish one or more tasks under specific conditions and to specific performance standards. A capability may be achieved with any combination of properly planned, organized, equipped, trained, and exercised personnel that achieves the intended outcome.” A *core capability* is defined in [PPD-8](#) as a capability that is “necessary to prepare for the specific types of incidents that pose the greatest risk to the security of the Nation.”

Furthermore, the NPS includes annual [National Preparedness Reports](#) that document progress made toward achieving national preparedness objectives. The reports rely heavily on self-assessment processes, called the [Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment \(THIRA\)](#) and [Stakeholder Preparedness](#)

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[Review \(SPR\)](#), to incorporate the perceived risks and capabilities of the whole community into the NPS. In this respect, the NPS's influence may extend to federal, state, and local budgetary decisions, the assignment of duties and responsibilities across the nation, and the creation of long-term policy objectives for disaster preparedness.

It is within the Administration's discretion to retain, revise, or replace the overarching guidance of PPD-8, and the 116th Congress may provide oversight of the NPS. Congress may have interest in overseeing a variety of factors related to the NPS, such as whether

- the NPS conforms to the objectives of Congress, as outlined in the PKEMRA statute;
- the NPS is properly informed by quantitative and qualitative data and outcome metrics, such as those gathered by the THIRA and SPR, as has been regularly recommended by the [Government Accountability Office](#);
- federal roles and responsibilities have, in Congress's opinion, been properly assigned and resourced to execute the core capabilities needed to prevent, protect against, mitigate the effects of, respond to, and recover from the greatest risks;
- nonfederal resources and stakeholders are efficiently incorporated into NPS policies; and
- federal, state, and local government officials are allocating the appropriate amount of resources to the disaster preparedness mission relative to other homeland security missions.

Ultimately, if the NPS is determined not to fulfill the objectives of the 116th Congress, Congress could consider amending the PKEMRA statute to create new requirements, or revise existing provisions, to manage the amount of discretion afforded to the President in NPS implementation. This could mean, for example, the 116th Congress directly assigning certain preparedness responsibilities to federal agencies through authorizing legislation different than those indicated by national preparedness frameworks. As a hypothetical example, Congress could decide that certain federal agencies, such as the Department of Commerce or Housing and Urban Development, should take more or less of a role in the leadership of disaster recovery efforts following major incidents than is prescribed by the [National Disaster Recovery Framework](#). Congress also may consider prioritizing the amount of budget authority provided to some core capabilities relative to others. As a hypothetical example, Congress may prioritize resourcing those federal programs needed to support the nation's [core capability](#) of "Screening, Search, and Detection" versus resourcing those federal programs needed to support "Fatality Management Services."

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